

Contributed

CALVIN'S SECOND STAY AT GENEVA.

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The return of Calvin to Geneva had been made possible by the return to power of the "Guillarmins," as the party of the Reformers was called. The leaders of the opposition were scattered.

Calvin arrived at Geneva September 13, 1541, and was received "with the greatest joy," as Beza tells us. He was at once received by the Council, who presented him with a new cloak, and straightway plunged into the work of reconstruction. A house and small garden were given him, with a salary of 500 florins (hard to be estimated in present day value), and supplies of wine and grain. It was enough for his simple needs. His wife and children were brought from Strasburg and his true life work began.

An "ecclesiastical constitution" was drawn up by a competent commission, and was finally approved by the General Assembly of the city in November, 1541. Calvin's legal training now stood him in excellent stead. Provision was made for the full organization of the Church and its discipline, and for the mutual relation between the Church and the State.

Under Calvin's judicious and patient leadership, complete peace with Bern was, after much wrangling, established February 3, 1544, and thus a serious obstacle to the success of the Genevan reformation was removed. The hated exile of 1538 became the practical leader of Geneva, after 1541, although he did not accept its citizenship till 1559.

There is no record that Calvin was ever formally ordained as pastor. His life from 1541 to 1564, when God took him, was a strenuous one indeed. In all that time he was never without opposition, except perhaps towards the very last. He was opposed from within and without, and till 1555 continually in danger of death. Every dark corner had its gruesome possibilities.

Here is not the place to draw a picture of Calvin as a man, nor can we, in a brief popular article, enter into the details of these momentous years of struggle. Suffice it to say that the old consistorial powers were at once employed with a steady hand to heal the festering wounds of Geneva. With Calvin, church discipline was more than an ideal, it was a matter of life and death. The gay and turbulent populace of immortal Geneva were suddenly thrust into a strait-jacket of the new laws. They had, in open assembly, willingly accepted the new constitution, and Calvin held them rigidly to it. Dancing, gaming, theater-going, ribald songs, boisterous conduct, disrespect to the ministry were forbidden, on pain of punishment. Church attendance, on Sunday as well as on week days, the calling of the pastors to attend the sick, within three days, household worship, etc., were strictly enjoined. Blasphemy and open licentiousness were severely punished.

Can one wonder that the old Genevese tired in a brief time of a life so sternly pious and restricted? And the great burden of the unequal struggle was laid on the shoulders of Calvin alone. How bitterly he complains in those early days of the inefficiency and sloth of his co-pastors! Not till 1545 did Calvin feel the

strength of the full support of the ministry of Geneva; not till then was it purged of all elements of opposition.

Innumerable were the conflicts which the great but human leader sustained in those years of burden bearing. His personal antagonists were legion. I can only touch on one or two of these conflicts.

He has been bitterly blamed for the death of Gruet, July 26, 1547. The opposition of the Libertines to Calvin had then fully developed. Gruet was suspected of having posted a threatening placard against the ministers on the very pulpit of St. Peter's, Calvin's own church. He was accused of blasphemy; and incriminating extracts of a book, supposed to have been written by him, were proved to be circulating among the Libertinistic families. He was condemned and executed under the prevailing laws. But after his death, under the rafters of his house the manuscript of his book was found. Henry says of it: "What are all the anti-Christian writings of the French Revolution compared with the hellish laughter, which seemed to peal from its pages?" The offense, for which he died, was as nothing compared to the greater one he committed.

Above all his antagonists towers the menacing face of Servetus and the fact of his lamentable death in 1553. I frankly say that Calvin never showed himself so human, so pathetically human, as in that sad trial. But he never was a hypocrite. As he saw the case, the glory of God was at stake in it. Always willing to forgive personal injuries and insults, he flamed up in bitter wrath when the honor of the Divine Majesty was touched. And Servetus blasphemed, as no man had done before him. Look at the different attitude of Calvin to the older Socinus, also an anti-trinitarian, but a reverent one! It was the blatant blasphemy of Servetus that touched Calvin to the quick, and extreme blasphemy in Geneva, even under the old law, meant death.

Life was sadly cheap in the sixteenth century, and true religious liberty was wholly unknown, even among the best. Servetus came to Geneva apparently at the instigation of the Libertines. Gueroult, one of the party, but banished from Geneva, had been the proof-reader of the incriminating work of Servetus—"The Restoration of Christianity." In the trial of Servetus the Libertines played their last card, and they played for a heavy stake. They lost and Servetus lost with them. Calvin triumphed. The Swiss churches, whose judgment Servetus himself had invoked, spoke against him. Even Melancthon sanctioned his death.

Servetus died. Could Calvin have finally prevented it? We doubt it. But in any case we are not ready to sanction the "expiatory monument," erected at Geneva, by Calvin's so-called friends in 1902. To do so would be to sanction an anachronism. Calvin did not stand above the level of his day. We admit it as a truism.

His long struggle with the Libertines was practically ended, with the resolution of the Council to leave the right of excommunication in the hands of the Consistory in 1554. It actually ended with the fiasco of the attempt to exterminate the French refugees in Geneva in May, 1555, and the consequent collapse of the party. From that day Calvin could breathe more freely, and yet there was no rest for him. He was never without opposition; to speak of him as the "dictator"